

Perspectives of Modern Sports Pedagogy

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This review intends to give a short overview of the development and future perspectives of sports pedagogy as a science. In this respect, a skeptical position is marked, because sports pedagogy seems not to be affirmative to the system of sports. The development of sports sciences as a whole proceeds, and the question is whether sports pedagogy could be the integrating “melting” point of the diverging sports sciences. This hope characterizes early attempts to determine the scientific location of the discipline. Although these former attempts have failed, the problem itself remains. The new bachelor and master’s degree courses of study established recently demand new ways of integrating modules. The integration of sports sciences has to take place with regard to the practice of future teachers. That is why the integration of different sport sciences must proceed even as specialization continues.

Key Words: sports pedagogy, sports sciences, subjects of research

Key Points:

1. The review outlines the location, assignments and objects of the science of sports pedagogy.
2. The question is whether, from an historical point of view, sports pedagogy should be regarded as an obsolete discipline or the crystallization point of the diverging sports sciences.
3. The task of modern sports pedagogy is to aid future teachers of physical education in developing a pedagogy of teaching competence, which includes an orientation on behalf of the practical relevance of the different sports sciences as well.

In Germany, for more than 30 years, the notion “Sportpädagogik” instead of “Theorie der Leibeserziehung” (theory of physical education) has been established as the name of that research discipline, whose location, assignments and objects of research shall be outlined in the following review.

The task is to reflect on the current problems of the systematic location of sports pedagogy. Sports pedagogy can be situated between education as part of the humanities on the one hand and the sciences of sport on the other hand. In a striking way the question is whether from a historical point of view sports pedagogy should be regarded as an obsolete discipline or whether this field could be the crystallization point of the diverging sports sciences?

Or in other words: The question of sports pedagogy as a science culminates today in the status of either being a precarious science, or having a reasonable future perspective which definitely includes a new, but in the historical respect old, view

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on sports sciences. This view should be interested in integrating future research as well as their current education programs.

The presentation of a skeptical summary might be surprising, because normally every scientific discipline is highly interested in underlining its extraordinary significance in the circle of other sciences. But sciences do only exist by bringing up questions, whose relevance and appropriateness to the subjects of research must be reflected at times. That is why the 1990s can be seen as a period of self-critical reflection on sports pedagogy. One example is the discussion about sport used as an instrument, which focused on the question whether sport could claim its own dignity and, therefore, should not be used as an instrument pursuing pedagogical objectives (2, 14). The discussion is still going on.

In order to explain the main topics of the scientific location of sports pedagogy the following remarks focus on three aspects:

- a short review on the development of sports pedagogy will be given.
- the relationship between sports pedagogy and sports science will be analyzed.
- sports pedagogical tasks and subjects of research will be presented.

Finally, an attempt at giving an outlook at the future of sports pedagogy will be made in which the skeptical point of view voiced at the beginning of this review will be put into perspective.

Review on the Development of Sports Pedagogy

Sports pedagogy defines itself as a special discipline of general pedagogy, from which it developed. But it is still linked with general pedagogy in its attempts to answer essential questions in the fields of education, socialization, learning and, a term difficult to translate, “Bildung”. This connection is explained by examining the historical development of sports pedagogy (12, 13, 17).

In order to demonstrate the close connection between the classical idea of human education and physical education, sports pedagogy even refers to the ancient Greek philosophy of education. The Greek concept of “Paideia” includes the beginning of the theory of gymnastic and artistic education. There is a link from Plato’s “Politeia” and Rousseau’s “Emile” to the beginning of modern pedagogy in the late 18th century: The education of a person to his or her perfection, or to quote Humboldt, “the harmonic and proportional education of man’s strengths to his entirety” (9: p. 64) includes the necessity of physical education.

Immanuel Kant’s lecture “On pedagogy” is a striking example of this. He describes a systematic location of physical education, with a complete concept of pedagogy as a science.

For Kant, physical culture is primarily necessary for men to reach independent aims as an individual person. Quoting Kant: “Strength, skill, swiftness, safety for example are necessary to walk on narrow paths at a high altitude, from where you look deep down into the abyss standing on a swaying surface. If man is not able to handle these situations, so he is not as complete as he could be” (10: p. 31).

Cultivating human skills, which—as Kant emphasizes—means “practice of the senses” (10: p. 32) as well, is not limited to acquiring individual skills. Physical education not only includes the task of cultivating the body but developing skills to get on in society (10: p. 33). Physical education in this sense is an indispensable part

of education in society. Right at this moment, British sports pedagogues are discussing “Citizenship Education—The forgotten subject?” (19).

Trying to be more accurate than Kant, Pestalozzi emphasized that physical education can be regarded as a precondition of moral education (12).

Physical education like education as a whole is a kind of art because the development of physical skills and the cultivation of senses do not come about by nature alone.

Therefore, it is a logical consequence that starting with the philanthropists, Gutsmuths for instance, a special theory of physical education as a part of general pedagogy has developed. The basic anthropological assumptions about the necessity of human education combined with the possibility of self-education—the German word “*Bildsamkeit*” seems to have no direct corresponding English term—are well-known through general pedagogy. These assumptions do also determine the outline of the theory of physical education. Today, it is Eckhard Meinberg who points out that Pestalozzi’s reflections on physical education in 1807 are still essential to the foundation of modern physical education (12: pp. 59-64).

Not only the so-called “*Theorie der Leibeserziehung*” in the years after World War II until about 1970, but also the later sports pedagogy—referring to the “realistic turn” of educational science in general at that time—still applies the basic assumptions that can be marked with the German word “*Bildung*” (16, 17).

In this context it should be noted that the modern sports movements can also only be understood by taking their pedagogical background into account: human physical exercise, game and competition, training physical skills to perfection—all these forms only make sense because athletes are looking to find fulfillment. This is the reason why the revival of the Olympic Games by Coubertin is based upon a pedagogical ethos. “*Religio athletae*” (4: p. 150) as he calls it, refers to the idea of self-perfection. To some extent, this idea demands that athletes moderate themselves, although the Olympic idea is also based on the famous motto “*citius, altius, fortius*”. From this point of view, it is understandable that the early attempts to systematically analyze the phenomenon of “human movement and sport” developed under the guidance of pedagogy.

The Relationship Between Sports Pedagogy and Sports Science

In 1949, Carl Diem (5: p. 5f.) suggested putting sports pedagogy into the center of sports science. Thus this vision indicated that this new science as a doctrine of acting man can be attributed to the science of pedagogy. It is worth mentioning that sports science cannot be reduced to the field of pedagogy as sports science comprises elements of the natural sciences as well as of the humanities. The same kind of argument can be found later in Ommo Grupe’s detailed reflection on the scientific status of sports pedagogy. He tried to point out in 1964 that sports science can be regarded as a part of pedagogy.

Looking back attempts made by Diem and other scholars to reduce the different disciplines of sports sciences such as sports medicine, sports psychology, sports sociology, or biomechanics to their educational aspects, seems somehow naive. What they did not consider was that the consolidation of new special disciplines, which are always based on the methods belonging to the disciplines they originate from, depends strictly upon drawing demarcation lines between rivaling neighbor

disciplines. This also applies despite the fact that they can look back at a longer history.

The striking result of this process is that, today, no homogeneous science of sport exists. It is more appropriate to speak of different single disciplines, that, added together, constitute sports science. In this circle the science of sports pedagogy is only one discipline among others.

Why should we see a problem in this matter and why is sports pedagogy in danger of becoming historically obsolete?

The advantage of the so-called positive sports sciences is that results of their scientific research can be transferred more or less directly to the system of sport. Disciplines depending on the scientific empirical ideals of methods—such as sports medicine and biomechanics for instance—turn out to be functional when it comes to optimizing sporting practices. They refer to facts that can be relevant either for the field of health-oriented sports with the emphasis on preventive matters, or as is the case in biomechanical studies for example, for well-known shoe companies developing extraordinary jogging shoes.

Sport even has an eminent political meaning, at least, ranging from comparing different systems to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those sports sciences involved in empirical research in particular supply political instruments for top-flight sport. Reputation and money for research projects strongly correspond with the success of athletes. It is worth mentioning that this process is infinite, even though the political battle of systems came to an end in 1990.

The crisis of top-class sport—doping, commercialism, professional sport pursued by young children who are forced to leave their childhood behind has often been noted. Never the less this crisis has not yet led to a sustained echo in the so-called positive sports sciences.

Sports pedagogy as a theory of acting, consequently follows the pedagogical self-image and is, therefore, interested in an individual's integrity and autonomy. Unfortunately, in this respect it appears to belong to a minority in the scientific community of sports sciences.

Sports pedagogy turns out to be an obstacle in the system of sports. In this respect sports pedagogy is not affirmative. Sports pedagogy offers a closer look at the specific contribution of movement, games and sport to the development and personality of children, young people, adults and senior citizens. Sports pedagogy shares with the general pedagogy a normative interest in the autonomous subject (1, 6). In addition, it provides the sports sciences with a critical potential that will have to be met with some response in the future.

The introductory thesis of this review referring to sports pedagogy as a precarious discipline leads up exactly to this point. The development of this science including its institutionalization through professorships at universities, was closely connected with the great expectation that by achieving integration sports pedagogy would improve its reputation. The early attempts of the systematic location of sports pedagogy aimed at integrating both aspects: theories of natural sciences and those of humanities under the leadership of pedagogy. That means sports pedagogy can be a kind of "melting pot" of all single sports sciences.

But even the modest hope for a pedagogical orientation of the sports sciences, as mentioned by Dietrich Kurz in 1992 (11), has been disappointed until now (8).

As for these considerations, we have to enquire: which special tasks and fields of research can be outlined for sports pedagogy nevertheless in order to claim its

scientific status?

Tasks and Subjects of Research in Modern Sports Pedagogy

At universities, sports pedagogy concentrates on qualifying students for teacher training at different school types. Furthermore, it offers courses to students planning to teach in non-school-areas after university who graduate with a diploma. In this context, the task is not reduced to the field of didactic or even methodological aspects of how to teach various sports as taken from the official program of competitive sports. Moreover, the main task is to impart an extended pedagogical teaching competence. This implies that the students become familiar with the main fields of research covered by sports pedagogy. In a systematic manner, we can list the following fields of research (15: p. 163 ff.):

1. The history of physical education is the subject of historical sports pedagogy.
2. Systematic sports pedagogy is concerned with the theory of science and methodological questions in order to legitimate the discipline.
3. Comparative sports pedagogy deals with the important intercultural interweaving of different forms of physical education.
4. Anthropological sports pedagogy legitimates physical education that reflects on human portraits, which themselves concentrate on the meaning of the human body. The phenomenological approaches (19) turn out to be most important and are gaining consensus in the scientific community.
5. Sports pedagogy is also a specific pedagogy for sport in schools. The conditions and possibilities of physical education at school are at the center of this kind of sports pedagogy. One example is the current discussion in Germany about: school as a “house of learning”. The sports pedagogical point of view is that this concept is extended by the demand for a “Bewegte Schule” (a school on the move). The idea is not to introduce movement in PE lessons only but in school life in general. An important aspect of sports pedagogy related to school issues is the field of didactics which cannot be isolated from the scientific results of general didactics.
6. Sports pedagogy also deals with sports that happen outside school. It embraces different fields and poses pedagogical questions about club sports, pedagogical problems and possibilities of top-flight sports and even research on occupational possibilities for master students of physical education in the commercial leisure and fitness sectors.

Looking at these different fields of research, it becomes obvious that they are not independent specific disciplines; however, they are integrated by the demand for investigating the present possibilities of educating human beings by movement, games and sports.

The touchstone of sports pedagogy as a science is ultimately practice itself just as the pedagogical competence in teaching imparted through our lectures has to be the foundation of the self conscience of the young teachers. This implies that the knowledge acquired must be useful. Finally, it is up to young teachers to develop an awareness of how all scientific fields in sport are intertwined in order to know what to do in their job. That is why the integration of all different sports sciences must proceed, although specialization moves on.

After the so-called “realistic turn” in the science of education, which took place in the 1970s and affected the field of sports pedagogy as well, we are now witnessing a second twist in the direction of pedagogy. Seeing the matter from this angle, sports pedagogy might have a realistic perspective in the future.

The science of sports pedagogy can emphasize that sport bears its sense not in itself but focuses on educating human beings. Because of this the single pieces of knowledge put together finally make sense if sports science is regarded as a humanistic science; therefore, it is most interesting that there is actually a parallel discourse in the Northern American theory of physical education about whether to revise primary objectives. Charles Corbin, Arizona State University, speaks about “misconceptions” in the American sports pedagogy and his self-critical statement somehow reminds European readers of the Reformpedagogical Epoche at the beginning of the last century and its rediscovery of childhood as a period of human development with its own dignity. Corbin points out: “Unfortunately, too many people in our profession decided that the Exercise Prescription Model, which was developed for adults, was a good one for children. ... Adult sport and exercise models have constantly been applied to children as if they were miniature adults” (3: p. 131). Further aspects of this discussion can be found in Siedentop (18) and Tinning (20).

With regard to the German situation and the perspectives of modern sports pedagogy, expecting sports pedagogy to be the driving force to integrate the sport sciences would be asking for too much (15). But the new Bachelor and Master courses that have recently been established require new ways of integrated modules that should help students to find an orientation on behalf of the relevance of their studies in practice. This new curriculum in tertiary education can only be successful if the different sports sciences are willing to cooperate and that means to accept that they are all involved in the process of educating potential teachers even though some students may decide not to go into teaching at school and work in other sports-related sectors.

Future might show whether such an expectation is naive or not. According to the authors’ opinion, in this point in particular there is a realistic chance that sports pedagogy and sports sciences may draw nearer and, therefore, share a common future perspective.

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